Stalin's Rise to Power

(the Politburo, the struggle to succeed Lenin, Key Historical Perspective)
1. What was the historical context of Stalin’s struggle for power? (Politburo)

2. What were the key stages of the power struggle? (Struggle of succeeding Lenin)

3. Why did Stalin emerge as leader of the Soviet Union? (key historical perspectives)
CONTEXT TO STALIN

× Lenin’s death: January 1924
  ○ Soviet Russia = one party state (3 yrs)
× Stalin’s rise to power:
  ○ Unexpected
  ○ Struggle to succeed = 1922 NOT 1924
× Not an articulate speech maker/intellectual
What factors led to Stalin’s Rise to Power?

- Early moves against Leon Trotsky
- The defeat of the left
- The defeat of the right

Power Struggle

Politburo
Born in 1878 in Georgia
  ○ Russian ⇒ second language

Introduction to Marxism ideology
  ○ Revolutionary Socialist group (Messame Dassy)
  ○ Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

● Organizing Strikes
  ○ Exile in Siberia
  ○ Overthrow of Tsardom... RETURN TO PETROGRAD

● Pravda, Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, Commissar for Nationalities.

Stalin = ‘Betrayer of Socialism’
  – Lenin
How was Stalin able to secure the Leadership of the communist Party?

Emergence
Intro to the Politburo

✘ Stalin was a member of the Politburo + Orgburo
  ○ Politburo => Political Bureau
  ○ Communist Party’s body: political decisions.

✘ Orgburo (not as significant as Politburo for Rise to Power)
  ○ Organisational Bureau
  ○ Key decisions about organizational work

● Seven officials elected from the Central Committee
● Met regularly and was chaired by Lenin
● After his death, it formed a ‘collective leadership’
Influential Members of the Politburo

- Grigory Zinoviev
- Lev Kamenev
- Leon Trotsky
- Nikolai Bukharin
- Mikhail Tomsky

And of course...
- Stalin
- Lenin

Stalin => General Secretary in 1922 (Appointed by Lenin)

Foundation of power within the Party

Promote and dismiss influential Party officials
Key to power = Party organisation ...... /= state institutions
The Party grew rapidly, numbering **800,000** members by **1925** and over **1.5 million** by **1929**
Trotsky was Stalin’s greatest opposition and rival however Trotsky held no significant position
Stalin lacked charisma
Trotsky saw Stalin as a “Grey Blur”
- Trotsky was ‘supposed’ to be the successor to Lenin

**Stalin’s rivals underestimated him…**

Centralised Control  ➔  Increased membership  ➔  Increase in Stalin’s Power
First sight @ Bureaucracy...

- Manipulation of different factions within the Party leadership against each other
- What side was Stalin’s side? ... Whichever was popular (pragmatist)
- Personal Rivalry:
  - Kamenev and Zinoviev resented Trotsky
  - 1922-1925: Triumvirate (to be further discussed) : Kamenev + Zinoviev + Stalin
  - Common goal: Trotsky to resign
Growing tensions concerned Lenin

Solution 1: ‘Joint Bloc for Democracy’ against growing signs of bureaucracy with Trotsky

Lenin became too sick… solution 1 was not executed

Testament:

- 5 possible successors: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Stalin
- Lenin resented Stalin calling him ‘too rude’ and suggesting his dismissal from the Politburo

Stalin on a tightrope: Lenin’s resentment had the power to bring down his growing support.
Did Luck have a minor role in the Rise to Power?

✗ Central Committee decided **not** to publish Lenin’s Political Testament
  ○ Some historians question Stalin’s ability to gain power had they published the testament...

✗ Stalin’s influence and blossoming power remained intact

✗ Outmanoeuvre Trotsky:
  ○ Stalin provided Trotsky with the wrong date for Lenin’s funeral
  ○ Trotsky’s reputation was in decline
Policy Disagreements

LEFT

- NEP should be replaced
- Rapid Industrialisation
- Collectivisation of agriculture

'Permanent Revolution'

RIGHT

- NEP works and should be maintained especially for the wellbeing of the peasants

“Socialism in One Country”
The Politburo: 1924–1926

‘Left Communists’
- Trotsky
- Zinoviev
- Kamenev

‘Right Communists’
- Bukharin
- Tomsky
- Rykov

Stalin moved his position between the two factions
Factors: In depth...
Early moves against Leon Trotsky

Triumvirate campaign against Trotsky:
April 1923 @ the 12th Congress

✗ Congress re-elected Stalin as general secretary

Stalin began to replace Trotsky’s supporters with supporters of the triumvirate!
The defeat of the Left Opposition, 1924–27

July 1926: Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev formed the *United Opposition*

- Breaking the 1921 ban on factions
  - Stalin had enough power to remove Zinoviev + Kamenev
  - Trotsky = only opposition
- Stalin expels Trotsky after Lenin’s Testament is published

10 December 1927 the United Opposition was over

... ISOLATIONIST TACTICS!!
The defeat of the Right Opposition

- 1927, bread shortages and high food prices led Stalin to adopt a new ‘left’ course for industry and agriculture
- Oppositions to Stalin were removed from positions of power
- Bukharin began to see the emergence of Stalin’s power
- Further isolationist policies
- The Right surrendered to Stalin
Why did Stalin emerge as leader of the Soviet Union?

KEY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
Power politics

- Manipulation of genuine political and ideological differences amongst the Bolshevik leaders

  → Robert Conquest: Stalin’s aim was simply to gain supreme power by crushing all other factions

  → Tucker: Stalin’s aim was to make himself into a revolutionary hero as important and famous as Lenin

  → Edward Carl: Zinoviev and Kamenev => weak willed according

  → Isaac Deutscher: Lenin was virtually isolated at the top of the party from the beginning
Common theme: Stalin = product of Russian history and the administrative system set up after 1917

Robert Daniels: ‘circular flow of power’

Administrative apparatus grew \implies Stalin’s power to appoint grew \implies Bureaucracy increased \implies Enabling Stalin to control party congresses
Socio-cultural explanations

Closely linked to structural explanations

- impact of the social structure on politics and development of the Communist Party

Sheila Fitzpatrick: During Civil War, the Bolsheviks attracted Russian patriots who resented the foreign intervention used by the Whites

- Manipulated by the party leadership.
Ideological explanations

✗ Genuine political differences among the communist leaders of the 1920s (NEP)
✗ E. H. Carr, Alexander Erlich and Moshe Lewin: ideological positions as more important than mere facades of Stalin

Stalin’s rise: political response by the centre to steer a midway policy course by adapting to majority opinion

Trotsky: Stalin’s victory was the result of unforeseen historical and cultural developments after 1917 rather than the mistakes of his opponents
### Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structuralist Approach: Richard Pipes</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Regards Stalin as a <strong>product of Russia’s circumstances</strong>: a strong ruler was required because the country was just emerging from nearly a decade of war and civil war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Stalin was the <strong>natural successor</strong> to Lenin because of the way the Party had become increasingly bureaucratized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuity between Leninism: Robert Conquest</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Lenin created the single party dictatorship and system of terror, which <strong>Stalin continued</strong>. So, Stalin was the heir to the Leninist tradition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stalinism viewed as a deviation of Leninism: Stephen Cohen</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Stalin <strong>distorted</strong> Lenin’s legacy. Lenin used terror during the Civil War only as a temporary, emergency measure; Lenin allowed dissent within the Party; Lenin was hostile to a cult of the leader. Stalin, by contrast, used terror as a normal feature of government when the USSR was at peace; he suppressed debate within the Party; he created a <strong>personality cult of monstrous proportions</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Historians like Cohen argue that communism could have developed in a very different, <strong>less brutal way</strong> if another leader, such as <strong>Bukharin</strong> had succeeded Lenin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>